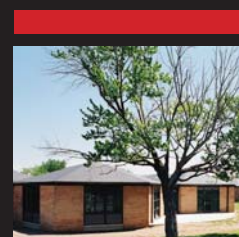


AN HONOR AND AN ORNAMENT: PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN MICHIGAN



State Historic Preservation Office
Michigan Historical Center
Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries

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PORT HURON HIGH SCHOOL.

"A new [school] house is to be built the ensuing summer...that will be an honor and an ornament to the town."

John H. Palmer, Barry County Superintendent, in the 1870 Annual Report of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction

INTRODUCTION

Throughout Michigan's history, public schools were often the first institution established in a newly settled community of the state. The school embodied a confident vision of the future for its citizens. They continue to be an important symbol of the progress and stature of a community. Their appearance reflects the civic role they hold as well as a host of practical concerns and idealistic goals at the time they were built. In turn, schools have significantly impacted the course of physical, social, and economic development in communities. Their location, appearance, and functions are major reasons why communities develop as they do.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) of the Michigan Historical Center, Department of History, Arts and Libraries commissioned this study of the history and architecture of the state's public elementary and secondary schools from 1835, when the system was established in Michigan's first constitution, to the present. The SHPO identifies, evaluates, registers, interprets and protects the state's historic properties. ICON architecture, inc. and Roy Strickland of the New American School Design Project, University of Michigan, prepared the study. Two products resulted from the study: this summary publication and a more detailed narrative.

The study focused on numerous factors, including state legislation, educational and architectural theories and practices, health concerns, demographics, and economic trends, which shaped the size and appearance of school buildings and grounds and their locations within a community. The purpose of the more detailed narrative is to provide the State Historic Preservation Office and others with an understanding of the important trends and events that influenced school design. The summary publication is meant to increase awareness and appreciation among the general public of the significant story of how schools developed throughout Michigan's history.

The summary publication also looks to communities to provide the SHPO with information about existing historic school buildings through the completion of an inventory form included with it.

Only a small number of Michigan's school buildings are individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the federal list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Many more Michigan schools are listed in the National Register within a historic district. With information gained from this study, and through the cooperation of Michigan's communities in providing further information on their historic schools, the SHPO can assist in determining which schools are eligible for listing in the National Register. As important architectural landmarks and social institutions in a community, many school buildings deserve this form of recognition. However, the most important outcome of this study is that a community recognizes the importance of its school buildings and makes thoughtful decisions about their continued use and location.

HISTORY OF MICHIGAN'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND IMPORTANT DESIGN INFLUENCES

Michigan possesses an astounding diversity of extant public school buildings that date from the earliest years of its public school system to the present and represent every major era of school building trends. These trends were both local and national in nature and were influenced by legislative reforms, educational theories, social and health concerns, architectural styles, and the economic situation.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IN MICHIGAN

The public school system in Michigan was established in the 1835 Constitution and in legislative acts of 1837 when Michigan achieved statehood. The early system called for the creation of primary districts, which served students of all ages in an un-graded school that was overseen by local officials. A newly created state position, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, was given little authority over the school districts. The primary districts quickly increased in number due to parents' desire to have the school, commonly a one-room building, near their home. Initial efforts by the legislature to allow primary districts to combine into larger districts, known as union districts, in the 1840s resulted in larger school buildings that

were called union schools. Like the one-room schoolhouse, union schools held all of the student population under one roof, but contained separate rooms for several grades. Union schools were mainly located in urban or larger rural communities.

In the late 1850s-1860s, as the state's population grew, overcrowding became a problem in union schools. As a result, ward schools were built in the residential areas for smaller children. These schools evolved into what were known as elementary schools by the early 20th century. Separate high schools for older students were initially seen in the 1860s. At first considered a luxury, high schools became the most prominent public education building in most communities by the late 19th century.

Consolidation efforts continued through the late 19th century as primary districts increased in number. The primary district schools were considered less advantageous than urban schools for children's education. As a result of an 1891 law, all of the primary districts in the Upper Peninsula were consolidated into township units by 1900. Like earlier union school districts, many new and larger buildings were erected to take the place of the smaller one-room and two-room schools. The growth of primary districts continued, however, and reached their highest number of 7,362 in 1912.

In the early 20th century, several new kinds of schools were introduced as a result of state legislative acts. These schools provided better educational opportunities in both rural and urban areas. They included manual training schools, rural agricultural and consolidated schools, and junior high schools. Manual training schools, initially privately financed by local industrialists to provide more practical job skills, became part of the local public school district beginning in 1918. Rural agricultural and consolidated schools from the early 20th century were created from new public acts that aimed to improve education in rural areas. These acts mandated the establish-



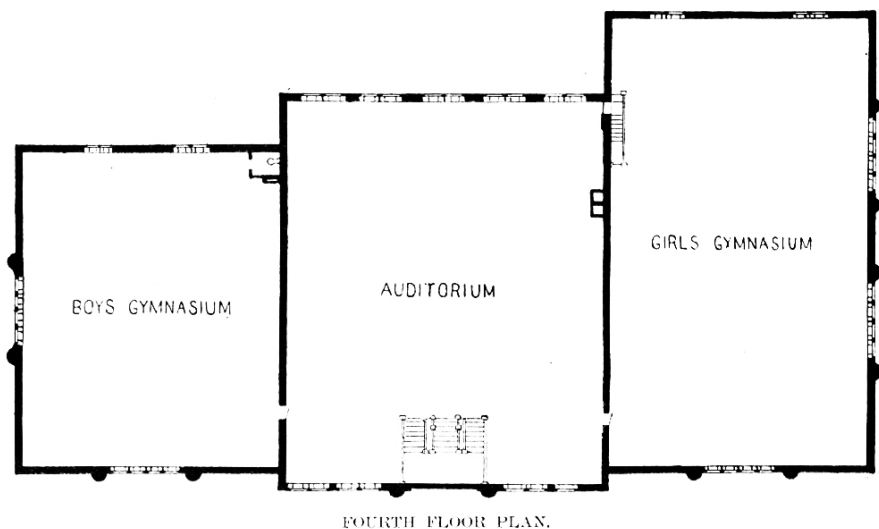
ment of high schools in rural areas and courses in agricultural, manual training and domestic science. The subdivision of young teenagers into separate schools beginning around 1912, known originally as junior high schools, resulted from growing recognition of their different social and educational needs. Kindergarten classes became a regular part of elementary schools by 1910. Classes for children with various disabilities were seen mainly in local school districts in urban areas by the early 20th century, sometimes in classrooms within an existing school or in a separate building.

Consolidations progressed during the 20th century, which eliminated many primary districts and closed thousands of smaller rural schoolhouses. The most common school types, elementary, junior, and senior high schools, increased in number as the state's population expanded. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, these new schools were built in suburban areas of older urban communities. Elementary and junior high schools remained within residential areas. High schools, typically located in the center

of town in the early 20th century, began to be moved to the edge of town due to demands for larger buildings and sites. Today, schools are larger in size and sited further out on bigger parcels as the population continues to move away from city centers.

Public school academies and charter schools have recently joined the traditional public elementary and secondary schools of the local public district, especially in the older urban areas. Housed in older public and parochial school buildings, newly designed facilities, and buildings with previously unrelated uses, these schools are becoming an important trend in education and, possibly, in community development patterns. The efforts to decrease the number of school districts through consolidation has resulted in the current number of 553 districts and 57 intermediate school districts, while a small number of one-room schoolhouses remain in operation.

In many communities, a new school building was erected on the ample lot of the older union school building, as seen in this image of Battle Creek's new 1908 high school and 1869 union school (left).
Courtesy of Willard Library



Grand Rapids' 1890 Central High School featured separate boys' and girls' gymnasiums on the top floor of the building, an early appearance of this facility in Michigan's school buildings (left).

IMPORTANT DESIGN INFLUENCES

Many factors shaped the design of school buildings. The most important influences over the past 170 years of Michigan's public school system are presented here. All of these trends and events, mirrored as they are in the physical form of the school buildings, reveal the fascinating story of this aspect of Michigan's history.

State Legislation

State public acts and laws and revisions to the state constitution have had significant impacts on public schools. Legislation created the different kinds

of school districts that resulted in their associated school building types in both the 19th and 20th centuries. The legislature also gave increased authority to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to guide and eventually gain more control over school building design. The expansion of the curriculum and reforms in health and safety that affected the physical appearance of school buildings were also due to legislative acts. These trends were seen nationally as well. Specific examples of legislation include the establishment of the union districts in 1842 and 1843, which produced the need for a single larger school building for districts formed from sev-

eral smaller primary districts; the 1915 law that gave the Superintendent of Public Instruction the authority to review all plans and specifications for new school buildings and additions over \$300; and the 1919 Millen Law that required physical education in the larger school districts' curriculum, resulting in more gymnasiums, larger playgrounds, and areas reserved for sports.

Social, Health, and Educational Reforms

Legislation resulted from the efforts of a host of interested parties representing social and educational ideas and reforms. These parties included the Superintendent of Public Instruction, local educators and school administrators, and organizations and individuals. Their influence has always been important, but was most conspicuous at the turn of the 19th century during the Progressive Era. Progressive Era reforms resulted in the improved quality of rural education and facilities, increased use of public school grounds and buildings by the entire community for a wide variety of functions, and mandated expanded curricula offerings that necessitated special rooms and facilities, such as science laboratories, kindergartens, and manual training rooms, not seen before in school buildings. The school garden movement at the turn of the 19th century, a reaction to the decline in farming and increased rural to ur-



The 1912 Lincoln School in McMillan in Luce County displays the blind walls employed in the early 20th century to control lighting in corner classrooms (left).

ban migration, resulted in legislation requiring nature study and agriculture classes. School grounds soon contained garden plots and conservatories became a standard feature of early 20th century school buildings.

Other social concerns included increased awareness of health and fire safety measures. Classroom lighting and quickly exiting the building in an emergency were the most influential concerns at the turn of the 19th century. By this time, it was commonly accepted that light should only enter over the left shoulder of students, so that eye strain could be prevented. Window shades provided a standard solution for older buildings, but new structures

increasingly only contained windows on one wall to control the incoming light. The overall layout became more extended in plan and corner classrooms frequently had blind walls. Timely exits from buildings during a fire or other emergency resulted in straightforward corridors and placement of stairways at the perimeter of buildings by the early 20th century, rather than in the more common central location of the 19th century. Today, new fire safety and lighting concerns are affecting new school design. National fire safety codes from the 1980s and 1990s require a window for egress in each student-occupied room, necessitating a change from the box-shaped schools from the

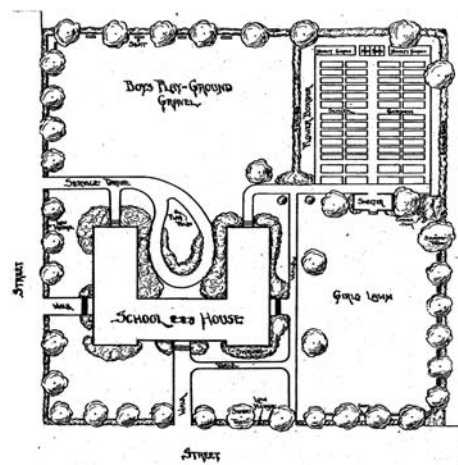
1970s-1980s that had few windows. More open and extended plans with numerous windows are the result. These new designs not only provide required egress but also allow more natural light to enter the classroom, now thought to be beneficial to student performance.

Educational ideas that were not legislated also influenced school design. These ideas are seen, for example, in the size of the classroom as opinion on the appropriate number of students in a room changed over time. Classroom size affected overall layout and size of the school building. Two notable school plans from the mid-20th century, the open plan and the house plan, came about from new theories about how students learn and the best setting to accommodate student's social needs. Today's new school buildings are increasingly being designed to respond to future, but as yet unknown, educational ideas and requirements. This design philosophy is reflected in flexible building systems and non-specialized design of many spaces. Most new school grounds continue to respond to needs of organized sports activities and their official size and facility requirements.

Architectural Publications and Educational Journals

National and regional architectural publications, building-related articles in educational journals, and designs presented in the annual reports of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction were the vehicles for many of the social, health and educational ideas and reforms that influenced school design in Michigan. Published images of model school buildings and layouts were available as early as the 1830s. The number of architects and educators developing and publishing school building designs grew in the late 19th century. In the 20th century, publications by architectural magazines, educational experts, and a series of reports from the Teachers College of Columbia University, the National Education Association, and the U.S. Bureau of Education continued to play a role in the development of school design. Educational journals routinely contained articles on school building design, hygiene, ventilation, lighting, and construction materials and provided one of the best forums for developing a consensus on appropriate school designs.

Architectural designs were presented or referred to quite early in the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction's annual reports. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the annual reports occasionally featured designs by Michi-



gan architects or local examples of a variety of school building types. The series of ten standard rural schoolhouse designs published in the 1916 annual report had the most noticeable impact and numerous examples of the designs have been identified across the state. Also published as part of a separate state bulletin that featured five additional designs, their widespread availability was due to free distribution of the plans to school districts by the state.

Early 20th Century Standardization Movement

The desire for standardization and “scientific” management, experienced throughout the country in the early 20th century, were manifested in school design. The Standard School program, the development of school design and siting standards by national organiza-



School garden plans were presented in early 20th century annual reports of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Opinion by educators on the appropriate number of students in a classroom changed over time. The average number in the 19th century was around 55. This view is of Battle Creek's Central (former union) School. Courtesy of Willard Library

tions, and an almost rigid uniformity of school layouts by the 1920s resulted from this movement. The national Standard School program, first introduced in Michigan in 1914, set requirements for the general appearance of rural schools. Organizations such as the National Education Association and the National Council on Schoolhouse Construction (now called the Council of Educational Facility Planners International), produced a series of standards on building and lot size, parking requirements, and required facilities that were faithfully followed by many Michigan school districts. These organizations' updated standards continue to shape school design in Michigan, as the state does not make recommendations or mandate design specifications for school facilities. By the 1920s, school buildings had become



a very recognizable building type, in no small way due to the national and local dialogues on the desirability of standard layouts and appearance.

Architectural Style

While the exterior appearance of schools was downplayed in official educational and architectural literature and thinking, architectural styles fashionable at the time are reflected in every generation of school buildings. Nineteenth century schools followed the styles commonly used for other building types including residences, churches, and public buildings. By the early 20th century, certain styles, such as Beaux-Arts, had become reserved almost exclusively for use on public buildings.

Some of the more characteristic examples of architectural styles used for school buildings include the brick Italianate one-room schoolhouses of the 1870s and 1880s and the Collegiate Gothic style that adorned many early 20th century urban school buildings. In the 1930s and 1940s there was reaction to the ornate architectural styles of the 19th century. Streamlined styles such as Art Deco, Art Moderne, and the International style with their simplicity of design, clean lines, and lack of ornamentation became the norm. The simple one-story, flat-roofed structures that proliferated after World War II marked a complete departure from the ornate, multi-story, pitch-roofed schools popular earlier in the century.

Economic Conditions

The economy and economic considerations were also important. Such events as economic depressions and wars greatly affected the number and appearance of school buildings erected during a certain period of time. A ban on construction to conserve building materials during World War I is why few schools date from c. 1917-1918. Only a limited number of schools were built during the Great Depression and World War II, mainly financed through federal programs. Other economic consequences can be seen in the favoring of flat roofs over more expensive pitched roofs beginning in the early 20th century, even before the onset of the modern architectural movement. One-story schools were considered much more economical to build than multi-story ones, despite the fact that more land was required to hold them. Beginning in the 1960s, many schools were built in modules and employed “systems” building components that stressed faster and less expensive construction methods.

Michigan’s public schools evolved in response to these many factors. As a result, school buildings express the beliefs and interests of their community throughout time. These associations with a community’s history emphasize and enhance the importance of the public school as a cornerstone of the community.

A full-scale model of the Michigan School, first introduced in the 1913-1914 annual report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, was erected at the State Fairgrounds in 1918 (left).

A GUIDE TO MICHIGAN'S MAJOR PUBLIC SCHOOL TYPES, BUILDING FORMS AND STYLES

Michigan's school buildings reflect the many forces that were present at the time they were built. Some factors were more influential than others on the introduction of a new school type or a school's form or style. Many times, the design of a school is based on a combination of factors and resulted in the variety of school designs we see in different historical periods. This brief guide is meant to provide basic information about the types, forms and styles of Michigan's school buildings in order to help communities identify their historic schools. The guide highlights the major forms and architectural styles used for Michigan school buildings. Other less commonly used architectural styles may not be presented here, however, there are a number of commercially available architectural guides that detail the distinguishing characteristic of specific styles.

School types are associated with a specific educational function. They are chiefly defined by the student population they served and occasionally by the types of classes offered or their association with a new type of school district created by the legislature. Examples of school types include high schools, vocational schools and one-room schoolhouses.

The overall massing, height, shape and floor plan of the building characterize **building forms**. For example, a cruciform plan school is usually two or three stories tall and its floor plan is shaped like a cross.

Architectural styles are distinguished by the decorative elements used for a building's ornamentation, the roof shape, and the shape and placement of window and door openings. For school



Grindstone City School (1906), Huron County

buildings, architectural style was not just embellishment; stylistic decoration often had symbolic associations that were significant to the original school builders. It is not uncommon to see elements of several architectural styles used on an individual school building that might make it more difficult to identify your school with a single style.

SCHOOL TYPES

PRIMARY DISTRICT SCHOOL

Primary district schools, commonly known as one-room schoolhouses, served students of all ages in the district in an ungraded classroom. Primary districts were created by Michigan's 1835 Constitution and are the earliest school property type in the state. Though found in some cities, this type of school was most typical in rural areas in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The

school was usually located on a crossroads near the center of the district. The school's hours and months were coordinated with the harvest schedule. Michigan had more primary districts than many other states; the highest number was 7,362 in 1912. District consolidations united most of the primary districts by the mid-20th century



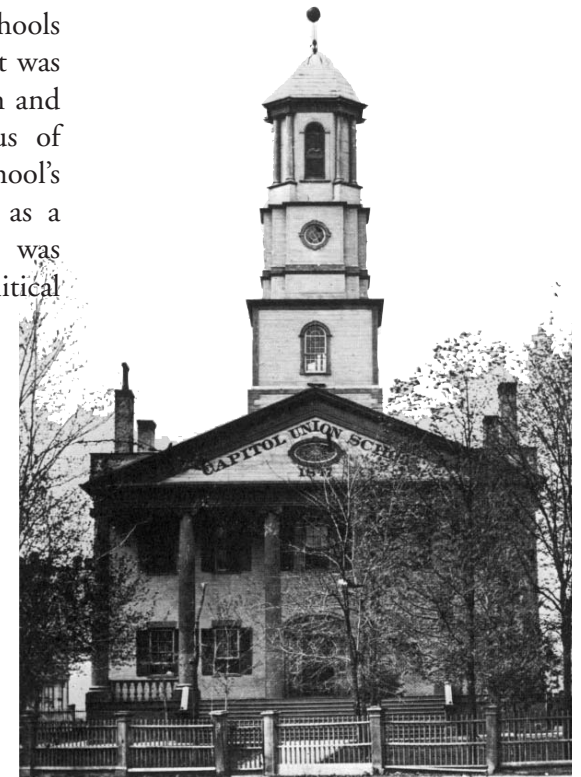
The 1847 Sessions School in Ionia County is one of the earliest remaining primary district school buildings in the state and displays unusual cobblestone construction. It was used for 50 years as a school; many primary district school buildings served for even longer periods of time.

UNION SCHOOL

Union schools were first seen in the 1840s when the state legislature created acts to allow two or more primary districts to consolidate. They were most common in the 1850s-1870s. All of the students in a new union district were in the same building, but were separated by classrooms into three or four grades or departments. Unlike primary district schools, union schools often had high school departments. The central location of union schools on a spacious landscaped lot was a symbol of a town's growth and prosperity and was a focus of community pride. The school's assembly hall often served as a public meeting space and was integrated in the town's political and cultural life.



The 1867 Douglas Union School in Allegan County may be the only remaining 19th century union school building in the state. The building, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, served as a school until 1957.

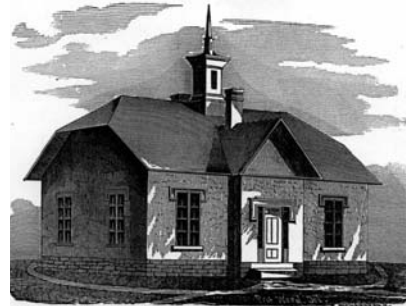


Detroit's first union school was housed in the former state capitol building, after the capitol was moved to Lansing in 1847.

SCHOOL TYPES

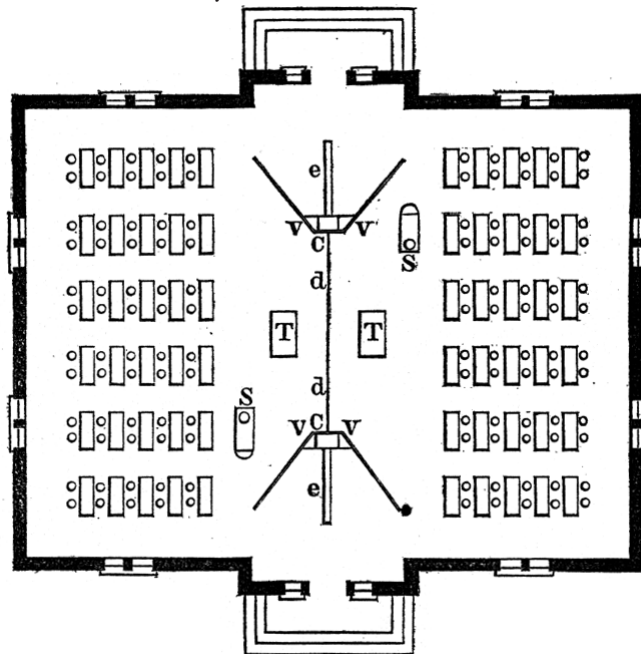
WARD SCHOOL

Ward schools were first seen in Michigan in the late 1850s. Ward schools were built for younger children within a community's residential areas. Their location within a neighborhood provided a shorter and safer walk for smaller children. As a community's population grew, ward schools helped relieve the overcrowding soon experienced in the union school. Early ward schools were usually two-room buildings; by the late 19th century, they contained from eight to twelve classrooms. As a neighborhood school, the ward schools' proximity to a family's home was advertised as a desirable community feature.



This two-room design in the 1863 annual report of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction was typical of the size of an early ward school.

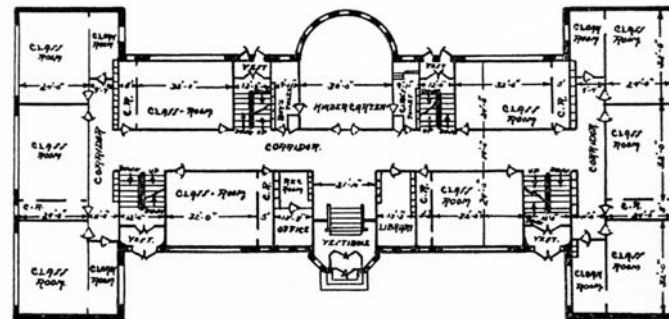
The plan from 1863 for a two-room ward or union school featured sliding doors between the rooms.



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Elementary schools evolved from ward schools and are usually defined as a school for children up to grades 6 or 8. The separation of older children into junior high schools (grades 7-9) began in 1912 and resulted in the current 6-3-3 system common in most Michigan public school districts. In the early 20thth century, kindergartens became a new feature of elementary schools. The kindergarten room was typically on the first floor near an entrance,

with a fireplace to create a more home-like atmosphere. In some elementary schools, the kindergarten room walls were semi-rounded to allow more light and fresh air into the room. Elementary schools continued the ward schools' role as the neighborhood school. The community regularly used the building and grounds for political, social, and recreational purposes.



The kindergarten room in the 1920 Playfair Elementary School in Hamtramck displays the semi-rounded walls first seen in the early 20th century.



Albert Schweitzer Elementary School (1957) in Westland originally featured an inner paved play court. It was designed by the Birmingham firm of Yamasaki, Leinweber & Associates. Its one-story height was considered desirable in the 1950s because it was thought to be "more friendly" to children.

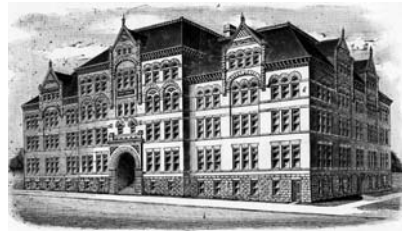
SCHOOL TYPES

HIGH SCHOOL

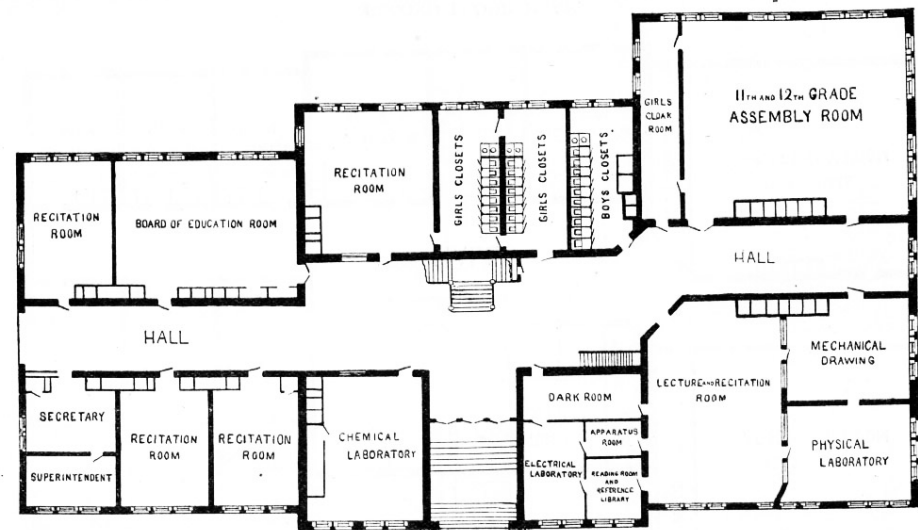
High schools flourished in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as society acknowledged that higher education was not just a luxury, but a desirable goal for all children. Separate buildings for high school departments, usually students 14 to 17 years in age, first appeared in the 1860s. In the mid-19th century, the first high schools were often housed in an old union school building, now too small to hold other grades. The number of high schools rapidly increased in Michigan after an 1874 court case established their legitimacy as part of the free public school system. In 1871 the University of Michigan instituted a certificate system that allowed students from approved high schools to enter the University without examination. The central high school soon became a major symbol of a town's success. The high school helped to promote an "urban" lifestyle through its athletic facilities, sports activities, auditoriums, and cultural events and contributed significantly to the local economy. The modern suburban high school reflects its social and economic relationship with the shopping mall through its similar internal organization and relationship to access roads and parking lots.



The city of Battle Creek still uses its original 1908 high school building, which was built next to the 1869 union school building. Land and building expansions have allowed the school to remain in a central city location.



Grand Rapids Central High School from the 1890s featured a more complex series of classrooms due to an expanded curriculum for high schools in the late 19th century.



SCHOOL TYPES

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Junior high schools, which first appeared in 1912, resulted from concern over the social behavior and dropout rate of young teenagers in elementary schools. Junior high school classrooms held smaller groups of students to allow for closer supervision. The junior high school curriculum was broadened to be more like that of a high school. Construc-

tion of a junior high school was also seen as a more efficient way to relieve overcrowding in both the elementary and high school buildings, as only one new structure was needed. Now referred to as middle schools, many adopted the mid-20th century house plan, or school-within-a-school plan, at an early date.



The 1962 Amelia Earhart Junior High School in Detroit, designed by Meathe, Kessler & Associates, was an early example of the house plan commonly used for junior high schools. The school was two stories in height due to its constrained site.

SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Prior to 1900, children with disabilities were educated either at home or sent to state institutions. Parents' concerns about sending young children away to school and a growing belief in more equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities resulted in state aid for classes in local school districts. Separate school buildings for children with disabilities were first built in the 1910s and 1920s, the earliest with private funds. Most were located in Michigan's urban communities and included schools for children who were anemic or pre-tubercular, blind, or crippled. The schools included many special features, such as ramps or open-air classrooms, in response to the disability that was to be accommodated at the school. Today, children with disabilities are provided with a variety of options for public education that include regular classroom settings or special programs.



Built by Frank Leland, president of the Cadillac Motor Car Co., the 1913 Leland Open Air School became part of the Detroit Public School system a year later. The tuberculosis epidemic, experienced throughout the country in the 1910s and 1920s, was mainly confined to urban areas where congested living conditions exacerbated the problem. The regimen addressed three essential factors of fresh air, good food and rest. Classrooms were well-lighted and kept at 60 degrees, requiring the children to wear outer clothing most of the time. Academic as well as health topics were taught.



The 1930 Ann J. Kellogg School in Battle Creek, financed by W. K. Kellogg, originally served elementary, junior high, and special education needs, an innovative concept that served the school population at large and children with disabilities.

SCHOOL TYPES

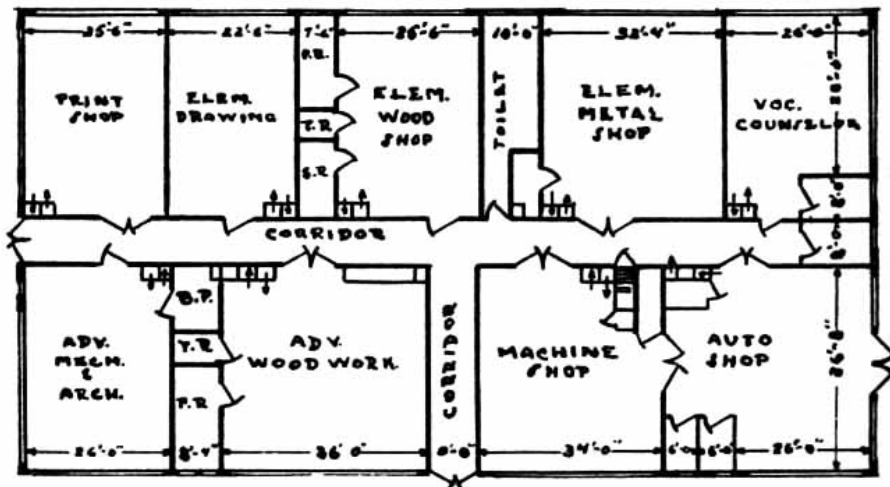
MANUAL TRAINING AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

Local industrialists privately financed the first manual training schools in the 1890s and early 1900s. They saw the need for more practical job training in the school curriculum that would serve the rapidly growing industries in many Michigan cities. Manual training and vocational schools became part of the public school system in 1918 after federal financing for this type of education was made available. Many high schools also provided industrial, automotive, domestic science, and business classes and sometimes a separate wing was built on the high school to accommodate these courses.



The 1905 Burt Manual Training School in Saginaw was financed by local lumberman, Wellington R. Burt, who donated \$750,000 to its construction. Arthur Hill, another lumberman, built a second technical school in 1912 on the west side of the city.

Hamtramck's 1924 vocational school was built at the urging of new Hamtramck School Superintendent, Maurice Keyworth. The school offered machine shop, auto mechanics, woodworking, sheet metal and pattern making classes that were shared by both the junior and senior high school students in adjacent buildings.



CONSOLIDATED AND RURAL AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL

Consolidated schools were created by public acts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The acts continued to reduce the number of primary districts that began with the introduction of union schools in the 1840s. Consolidated districts were mainly rural and usually larger than early union districts because of the higher number of primary districts that were consolidated. The size of the consolidated districts prevented most children from walking to school and required transportation services. Like union schools, consolidated schools served all grades in a single building. The acts also strove to improve rural schools by requiring the establishment of high school departments and expanded curriculums to keep up with urban schools. Rural agricultural districts, first legislated in 1917 and 1919, provided for agricultural and manual training and domestic science courses in rural schools. Their purpose was to teach improved farming techniques and other practical skills to battle the growing rural

to urban migration of the early 20th century. Use of school facilities for community activities was mandated in the rural agricultural district acts.



The 1921 Sand Creek Consolidated Agricultural School in Lenawee County was retained by the community, which recently added a new high school section to accommodate the growing school population.



By World War I, motor buses replaced horse-drawn vehicles for students' transportation to Grosse Ile's consolidated school.

BUILDING FORMS (1835-1900)

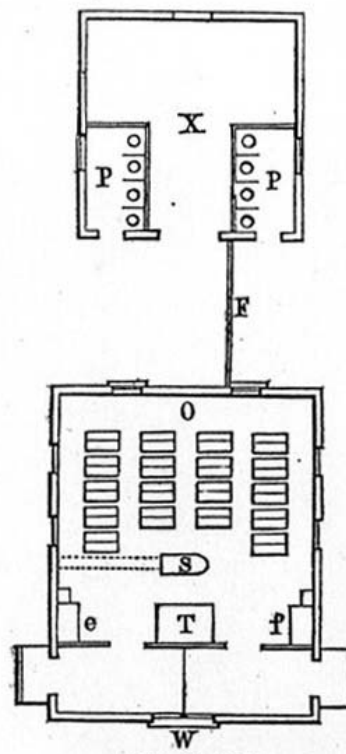
Michigan's earliest schools used several major building forms depending on their location (rural or urban) or size. Schools evolved from one room, in which all ages were taught at the same time, to more complex plans that separated students by grade. Still, even these complex early school plans were typically designed as just a series of one-room schools assembled next to and on top of each other. Classrooms were not differentiated by function or size and the most varied elements in early school plans were the location of hallways and exits. These basic building forms were usually decorated in a variety of architectural styles—whatever was fashionable in a community during a given period of time. Thus, a one-room schoolhouse or a cruciform plan school could be decorated in a popular 19th century architectural style, depending on where and when it was built.

ONE-ROOM PLAN

Most one-room schoolhouses were extremely basic in design consisting of a simple square or rectangle plan. The plan had little subdivision of space and was vertically oriented to the roadway. Later 19th century one-room schoolhouses typically included an entrance vestibule with separate cloakrooms for boys and girls. Most were built of frame, although many early ones were log. Brick and stone examples were most common in southeastern Michigan.



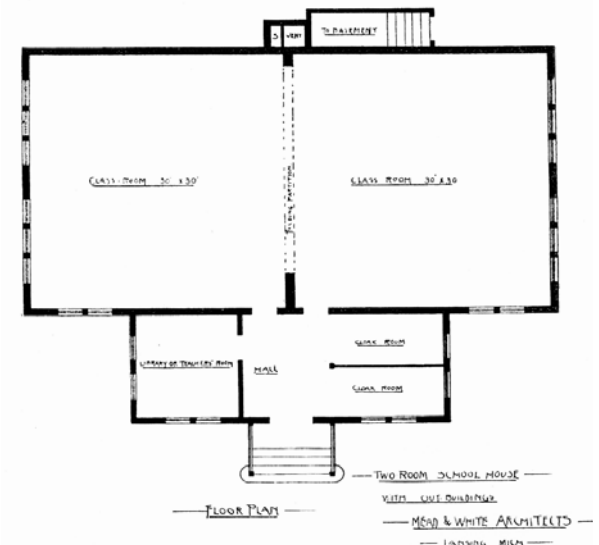
Big Stone School in New Baltimore from 1886 had vestibules and cloakrooms seen in many one-room schools by the late 19th century. Separate entrances for boys and girls, seen here, were not as common.



This example of good schoolhouse design was in the 1863 annual report of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction. The one-room plan had separate entrance vestibules and a large outhouse; neither was typical at this time.

TWO-ROOM PLAN

Two-room plans were commonly used for early ward schools and small union schools. Their rectangular footprint was oriented horizontally, unlike the one-room plan. Some 19th century plans had sliding or folding partitions between the rooms for more flexibility in use.

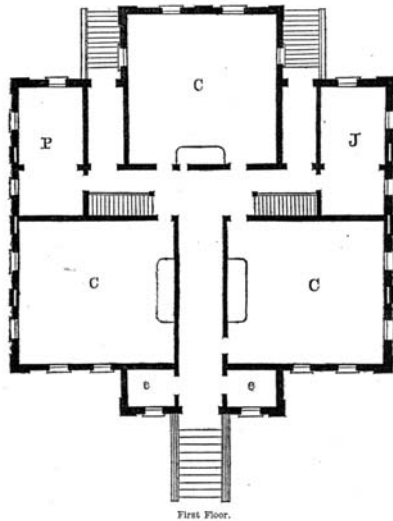


A model two-room plan from 1897 by architects Mead & White featured a folding partition between the rooms.

BUILDING FORMS (1835-1900)

CRUCIFORM PLAN

A cruciform footprint was commonly used for larger urban school buildings constructed in the 1860s-1880s. The plan is shaped like a cross and features one or two corridors running the length or width of the building with equal size classrooms on each side of the corridor. Stairways were usually located in the center of the building. Cruciform plan schools were commonly two or more stories in height. The main entrance was located in the center of the building in a projecting section. The plan allowed ample light into classrooms as each wall surface contained numerous windows.



Coldwater's union school had a central corridor leading from the front central entrance that connected to a U-shaped corridor with separate boys' and girls' entrances in the rear.

RECTANGULAR PLAN

Another common form is a two-story rectangular structure with a projecting front central section and tower or cupola in the center of the hip or gable roof ridge. This form is seen as early as the 1840s and its use continued into the early 20th century for union and high schools. Most have a central hall that ran from the front to the rear with a single classroom on each side.



Baraga County's Arvon Township School, built in 1910, is a later example of the rectangular plan form.

CENTRAL TOWER PLAN

Both small and large school buildings employed a projecting front central tower form popular in the 1890s and early 20th century. The form features a prominent hipped roof and a distinctive projecting front tower section. In some examples, the tower is located in the center of the roof, but a projecting front section remains a feature.



Pontiac's Central Elementary School from 1893 is one of the larger examples of the projecting central front tower form. It also incorporates elements of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.



The Harvey School in Chocolay Township, Marquette County, dates from around 1905. Although its small central tower is located in the center of the hip roof, the large dormer and projecting front section suggest the front central tower plan.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES (1835-1900)

School buildings in the 19th century appeared in many different architectural styles, partly because so many styles were popular and because there was no consensus on the proper architectural appearance of school buildings at this time. Only the major styles from this period are presented, but others included Second Empire (1860-1880), High Victorian Gothic (1870-1885), and Stick style, a simpler version of the Queen Anne style (1870-1890). Elements from several styles often adorned a school building and many times stylistic details were added to a commonly-used building form.



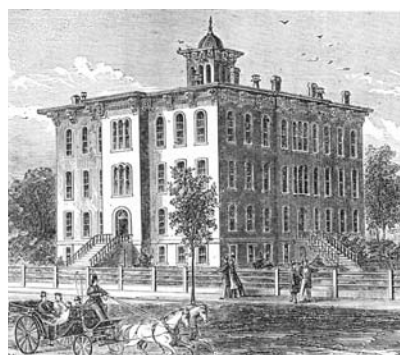
The 1848 Fayette Union School in Jonesville, Hill-sdale County, was Greek Revival in style. Other Greek Revival schools had a front gable, unlike this school's side gable orientation.

GREEK REVIVAL

The Greek Revival style was one of America's first national styles and was commonly used between 1830-1860. It is distinguished by the use of classic Greek elements such as a prominent central gable or pediment, wide cornice boards under the eave line, and simple decorative details such as dentils. Doors and windows are symmetrically placed. Roofs have a low pitch and columns or pilasters are often used.

FIRST RENAISSANCE REVIVAL

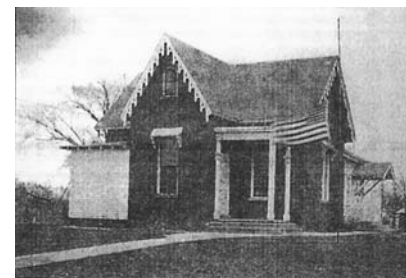
The First Renaissance Revival style was commonly used in the 1860s-1870s for union and high schools. Symmetrical elevations, a low-pitched roof and grouped window openings characterize the three-and four-story buildings designed in this style.



These First Renaissance Revival style high schools in Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo (top and bottom) date from soon after the Civil War. The beautifully landscaped grounds were typical of union and high school properties in the late 19th century.

GOTHIC REVIVAL

Multi-story urban and one-story rural and ward schools were designed in the Gothic Revival style in the 1850s and 1860s. It emphasized the vertical lines of the building through the use of pointed arch windows and steep gable roofs. The buildings typically have irregular massing. Highly decorative bargeboard (gingerbread trim) is typically found under the eaves. In frame buildings, the use of board and batten (vertical) siding is common.

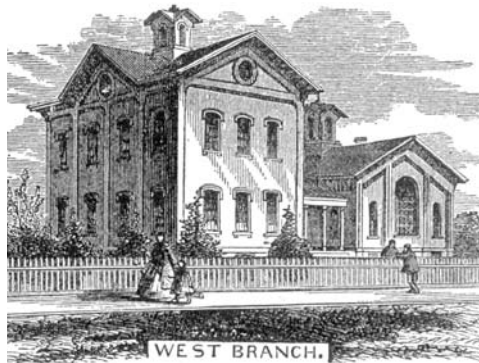


Niles' Northside Primary School from the 1860s features bargeboards common in the Gothic Revival style.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES (1835-1900)

ITALIANATE

Many late 19th century schools adopted elements of the Italianate style. Round or segmental arched windows and doors and the use of heavy decorative brackets under wide eaves identify the style. Quoins, decorative brick or stone blocks at the building's corners, are a common feature. A belvedere, or cupola, is sometimes located at the roof's center.



Adrian was one of the earliest communities to build ward schools, or branch schools as they were called here. Their buildings reflected the prevalent Italianate and Gothic Revival styles of this period.

QUEEN ANNE

The Queen Anne style was used for late 19th century multi-story ward schools and smaller one-story rural schools. A complex roof shape and asymmetrical massing are hallmarks of the style. Bay windows and a variety of exterior finishes and patterns are also common.



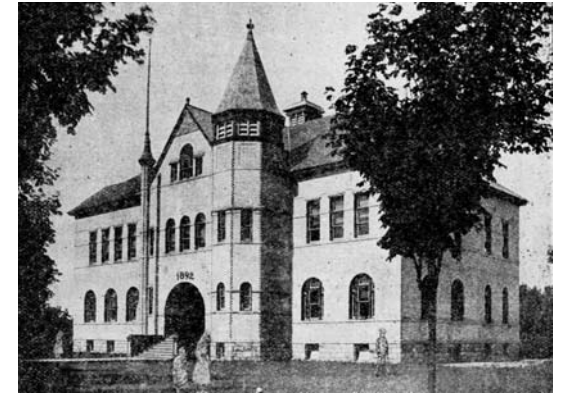
This drawing of a model rural schoolhouse in the Queen Anne style was in the 1882 annual report of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction.



The 1888 Jefferson School in Alpena was considered the community's finest ward building when it was completed. The Queen Anne style of the school lent it a more residential appearance within the neighborhood.

RICHARDSONIAN ROMANESQUE

This style is distinguished by its heavy mass and gives the impression of strength and durability. Entrances are often emphasized by the use of low, rounded arches of rough cut stone. Windows, usually in pairs or triplets, are deeply recessed. This style was most popular in the 1890s for large urban schools.



Hart's new union school from 1896 was designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

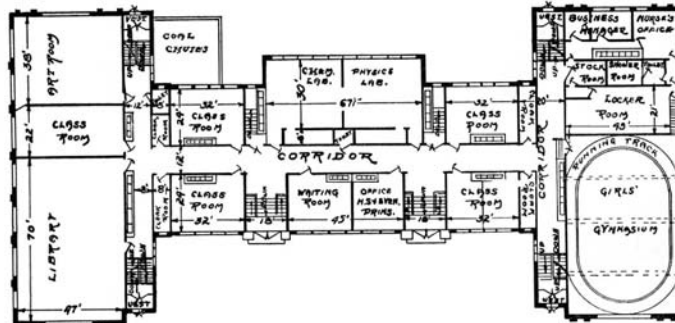
BUILDING FORMS (1900-1945)

School plans and forms became more uniform in the early 20th century as educators and architects agreed on standard layouts for school buildings. Classrooms were usually located on either side of a corridor, known as a doubled-loaded corridor. As schools became more integrated for community use, auditoriums and gymnasiums became more common in the plans. Auditoriums and gymnasiums, occasionally combined in one space, were typically located near the front entrance on the first floor for easy access by the general public. Other new functional spaces during this time period included lunchrooms and manual and other vocational training rooms.

ALPHABET PLAN

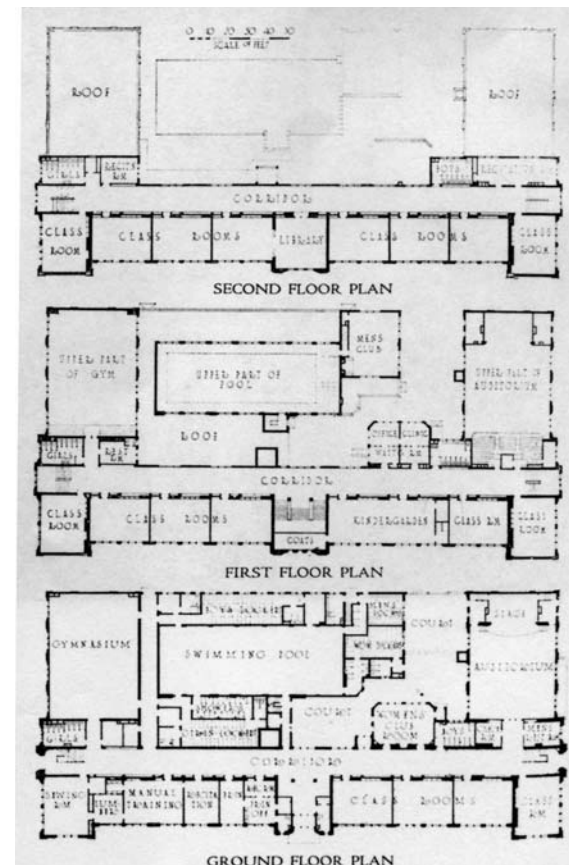
In the early 20th century, many urban schools had alphabet plans. The plan was named for their footprints that took the form of letters of the alphabet. The most popular plans were “H”, “I”, “T” and “C”. The plan, usually found in a two- or three-story building, has a central lateral corridor connected to the front entrance by a short hall. The distinguishing feature of the plan is its symmetrical layout in the shape of a letter of the alphabet. Alphabet plan buildings exhibit many different architectural styles, including both classically inspired and more picturesque styles.

Hamtramck's 1916 high school had an “H” plan, one of the most popular forms of the alphabet plan. The plan features a long lateral corridor with shorter perpendicular wings that held the larger functional spaces.

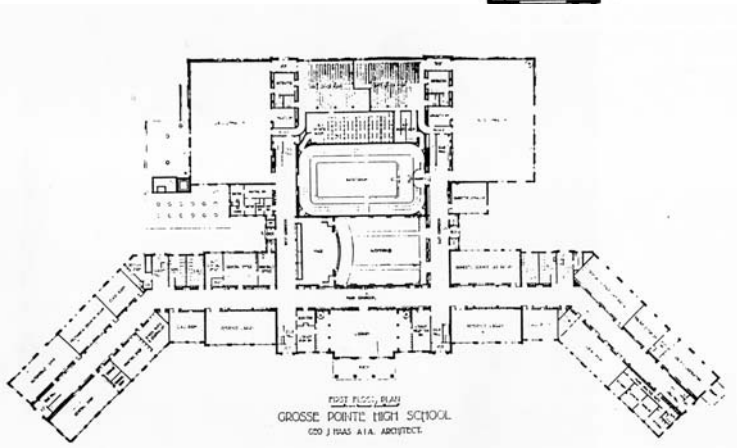


PLATOON PLAN

Although not markedly different in form from the typical alphabet plan schools, platoon plan schools always have separate auditoriums and gymnasiums, sometimes more than one of each. The platoon plan school was designed for the use of all rooms throughout the day by two sets of students.



Balch Intermediate School was one of many Detroit schools designed on the platoon plan in the 1920s.



Grosse Pointe South High School's original I-shaped plan with diagonal side wings has been expanded to include separate and connecting additions on its 15-acre site.

BUILDING FORMS (1900-1945)

RURAL SCHOOL STANDARD DESIGNS

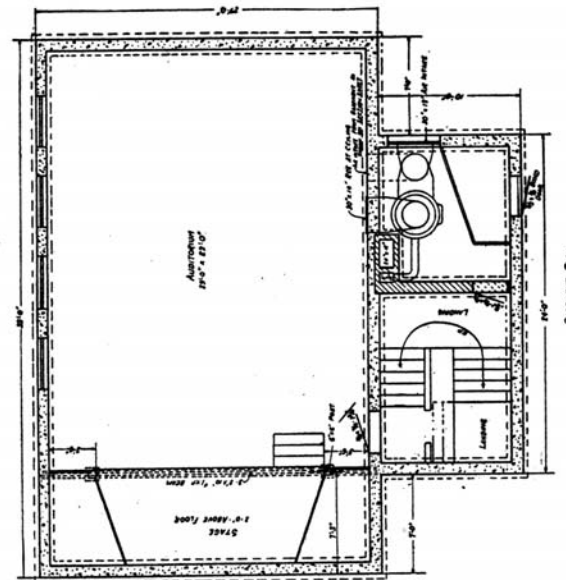
Many rural schools from the early 20th century followed one of the 15 one- and two-room designs offered free by the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction. The designs feature compact forms that were rectangular, square and L-shaped in plan. Roof types are hip or gable. Several of the plans include basements and additional small rooms adjacent to the single classroom.



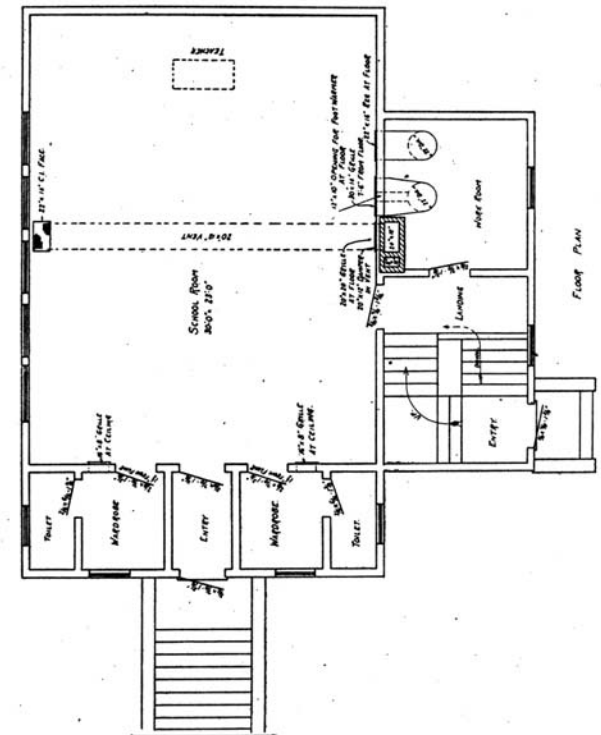
Design No. 9 for two-room schools was used in Redford Township in Wayne County and in Shingleton, Schoolcraft County (seen above).



Design No. 9.



The 1924 school in Oshtemo Township, Kalamazoo County, followed Design No. 6, which featured a stage in the basement and a workroom adjacent to the single classroom.



ARCHITECTURAL STYLES (1900-1945)

A more limited choice of styles was used for schools in this time period. Early on, historical revival and classically derived styles dominated until the onset of more modern styles in the late 1920s.

BEAUX-ARTS

The Beaux-Arts style was used mainly for early 20th century urban high schools. The style is distinguished by its symmetry and central, usually round-arched, entrance with large paired columns. The roofs are always low-pitched or flat, sometimes with elaborate railings on top.



Battle Creek's 1908 high school combines elements of the Beaux-Arts with the Second Renaissance Revival style, also popular for schools in the early 20th century. The raised foundation with prominent horizontal blocks is characteristic of Second Renaissance Revival. Columbus, Ohio, architect Wilbur T. Mills designed the school.

COLLEGIATE GOTHIC

By the end of World War I, around 75% of the country's new school buildings were designed in the Collegiate Gothic, or Jacobethan, style. Chosen for its scholastic connotations, the style features large window bays with multi-paned sash and elaborate entrances with a wide pointed arch. Roofs are usually either flat or low-pitched and exterior walls are smooth with raised moldings.



The former Stiles School in Rochester Hills from 1929 is a later, simpler version of the Collegiate Gothic style. It was designed by architect Frederick Madison of Royal Oak.



The 1918 Fountain School in Grand Rapids, one of the few school buildings erected during World War I, has a classic entrance in the Collegiate Gothic style.



Grand Rapids' 1911 Central High School, designed by local architects Robinson & Campau, is an early example of the Collegiate Gothic style.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES (1900-1945)

GEORGIAN REVIVAL

The Georgian Revival style was often chosen for large urban high schools in the 1910s and 1920s. The style was well suited to portray the civic stature of central high schools of this period. Common elements include a central gable or pediment and columned porticoes, or porches, at the entrance. Round-arched or square multi-paned windows and overall symmetry also characterize the style.



Clare Public (now Middle) School from 1922 features large round-arched windows characteristic of the Georgian Revival at the front of the building where the auditorium is located. Elements of the less frequently used Craftsman style are seen in the overhang with large brackets above the windows.



Grosse Pointe's 1928 high school building, now Grosse Pointe South High School, is one of the most highly finished Georgian Revival high school buildings in the state. George Haas of St. Clair Shores was the architect.

ART MODERNE

Art Moderne was used for schools built during the Great Depression and World War II. The style, used on large and small urban schools, features rounded corners and bays, bands of steel frame windows and the use of glass block. Exterior walls were typically concrete block, stucco, or brick.



Lansing's 1943 J.W. Sexton High School is a notable example of Art Moderne style in the state. Prolific school architects Warren S. Holmes Co. of the same city designed the building.

ART DECO

Introduced in the late 1920s, Art Deco is characterized by a symmetrical front, stylized floral and geometric ornament and parallel lines around windows and doors. A limited number of school buildings were seen in this style for a brief period from around 1930 until 1940. This style was popular for schools built with federal relief funds by agencies such as the Public Works Administration (PWA) during the Depression.



Saline School from 1930 features Art Deco detailing around the entrance. The cornerstone features the names of its architects, Fry & Kasurin of Ann Arbor.



Harsen's Island school in St. Clair County from 1935 is a modest rendition of the Art Deco style.

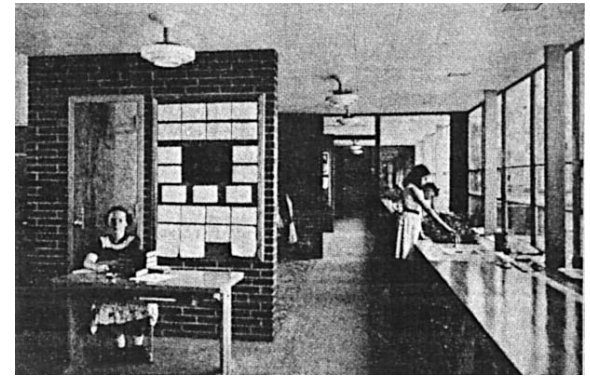
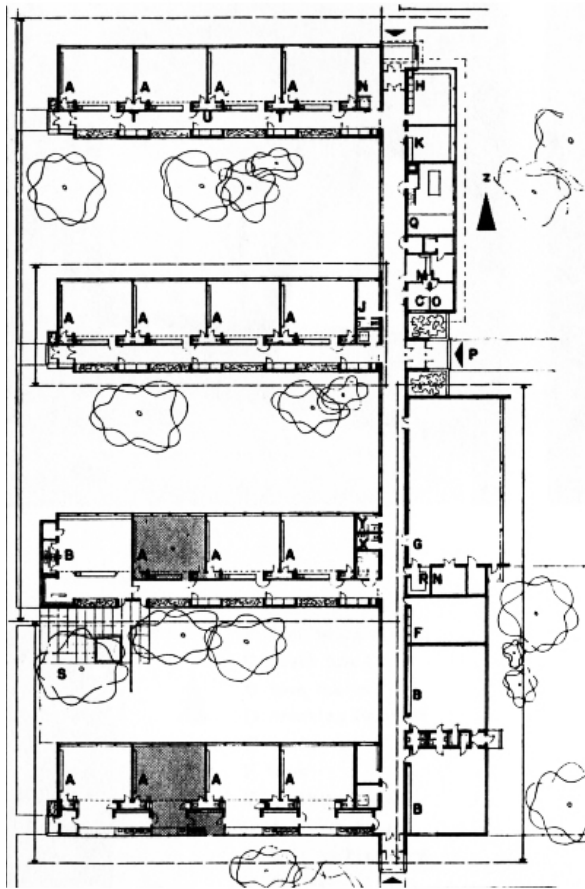
BUILDING FORMS (1945-Today)

More emphasis on form characterized this period, as the plan became the most important factor in determining school building form and design. The sprawling one-story, flat-roofed school, similar in design to the residential ranch house popular during this same period, was dominant. Floor plan variations reflected experimentation in layouts based on educational theories and environmental concerns. To accommodate the Baby Boom that followed World War II, future additions that would handle increased student populations were outlined on many of the schools' site plans. These schools required larger parcels for their construction than schools in the past. Absence of ornamentation was common; most buildings were almost stark in their design.

Today, more school buildings allude to the older school forms and styles through such features as bell towers and pitched roofs. Only school buildings from the early part of this period can be classified by architectural style, most commonly variations on the International Style. There are no universally accepted names for the styles of more modern school buildings.

FINGER PLAN

Finger plans, usually in an “E” shaped footprint, feature an absence or minimization of corridors and allowed direct access to school grounds. Interior courts are often located between the individual fingers of the plan.



The corridor provided a secondary activity space for nature and plant study.

Designed by influential school architect Eberle M. Smith of Detroit, Ferndale's Andrew Jackson Elementary School from 1949 had a finger plan that incorporated the corridor into the classroom space.

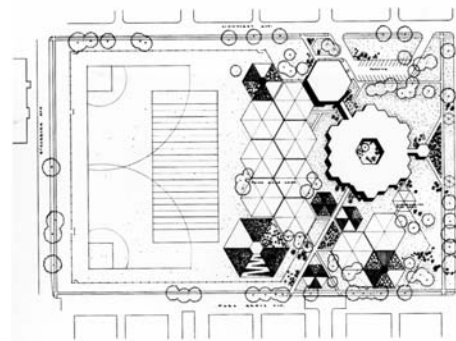
BUILDING FORMS (1945-Today)

UNIT PLAN

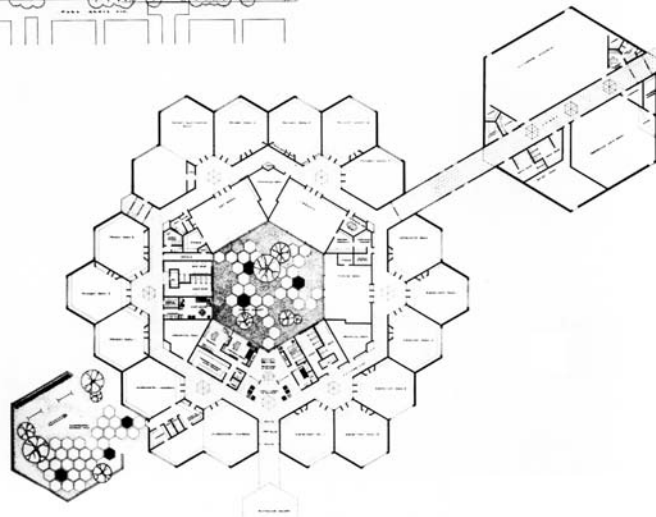
Unit plans are composed of a series of small units that could be easily duplicated and expanded to increase classroom space, an important factor in school buildings in the 1950s and 1960s. The hexagonal unit plan was especially popular because it provided efficient and flexible spaces.



This hexagonal plan school from 1958 was designed by Yamasaki, Leinweber & Associates, one of a number of school buildings the Birmingham firm designed for the Wayne-Westland school district in the late 1950s.



An addition constructed in 1989 to the 1962 Fleming Elementary School in Detroit demonstrated the ability to expand from the original central section. William Kessler & Associates were the architects.



INTERNATIONAL

The International Style was first introduced in the 1930s, but was more regularly seen in the 1950s. Cube-shaped forms, minimal ornamentation, corner and ribbon windows, and a flat roof identify the style. Many schools from the 1950s and 1960s had ribbon windows at the top of the wall, called clerestory windows. In the 1960s, wide panes of floor to ceiling windows were common. Simple details such as saw tooth awnings and colored glazed bricks were typical decorative features.



Walter P. Chrysler Elementary School was built in 1962 within the Lafayette Park development in downtown Detroit. Its design by Detroit architects Gould, Moss and Joseph follows the simple lines of the surrounding buildings.

BUILDING FORMS (1945-Today)

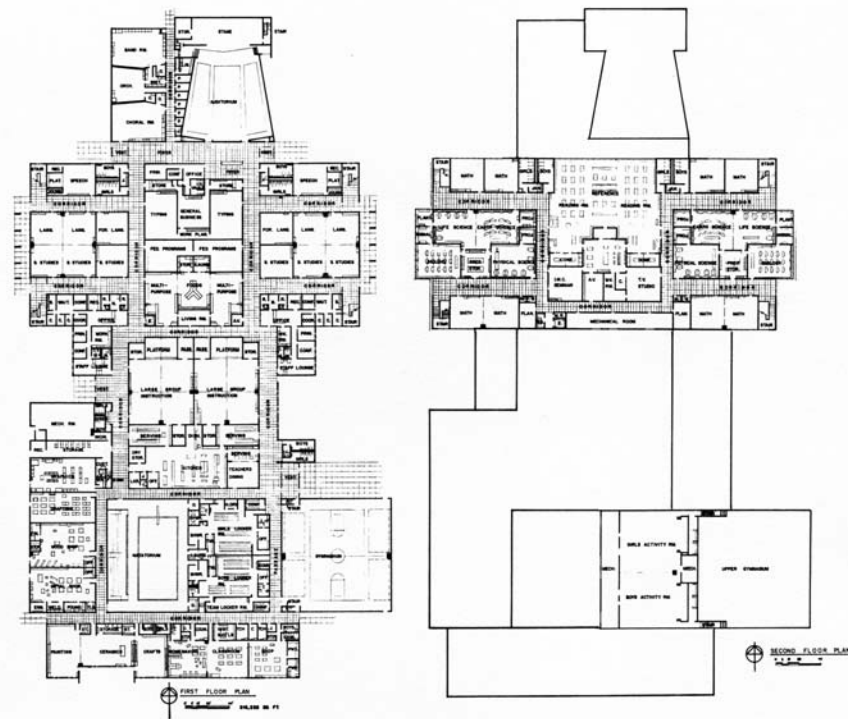
HOUSE PLAN

The house plan, also known as “school-within-a-school” or hall plan, was originally used in the 1960s in junior high schools. Separate, usually identical, halls

or schools with smaller groups of students surround a central media center and other specialized spaces. Used since the early 1960s up to the present, the exterior appearance of buildings using this plan varies.

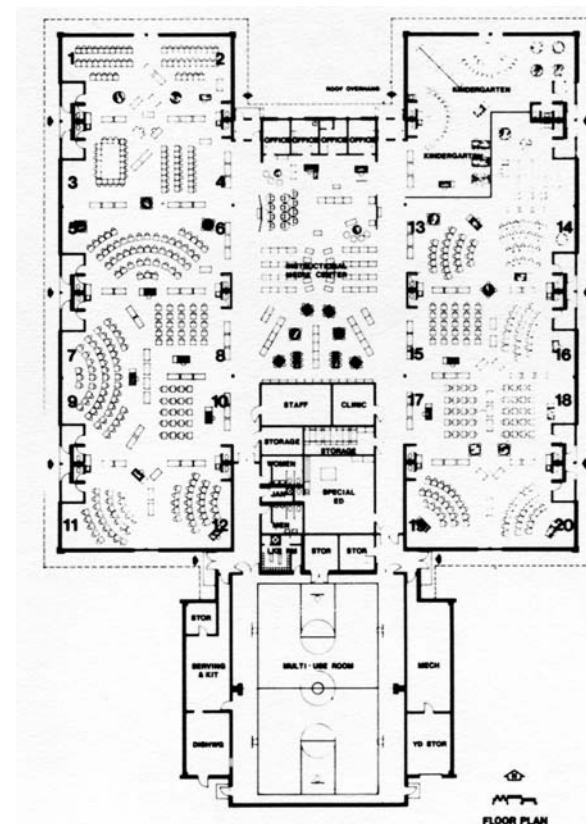


The Gardner Jr. High School of 1966 in Lansing is an early example of this plan. It has two separate smaller groupings of home-base classrooms and shared facilities for art, industrial education, special education, music, library, and physical education. Manson, Jackson & Kane of Lansing were the architects.



OPEN PLAN

New educational concepts influenced the open plan school of the 1970s and 1980s. Team teaching and more individualized instruction resulted in a plan with few permanent walls and flexible divisions of space. Two main parallel hallways usually separate the open classroom spaces. Some older school buildings were remodeled to adopt this plan through the removal of original walls.



The 1975 Wacousta Elementary School in Wacousta today retains its open plan, with classrooms surrounding the media center core. The Lansing architectural firm of Manson, Jackson & Kane designed the building.

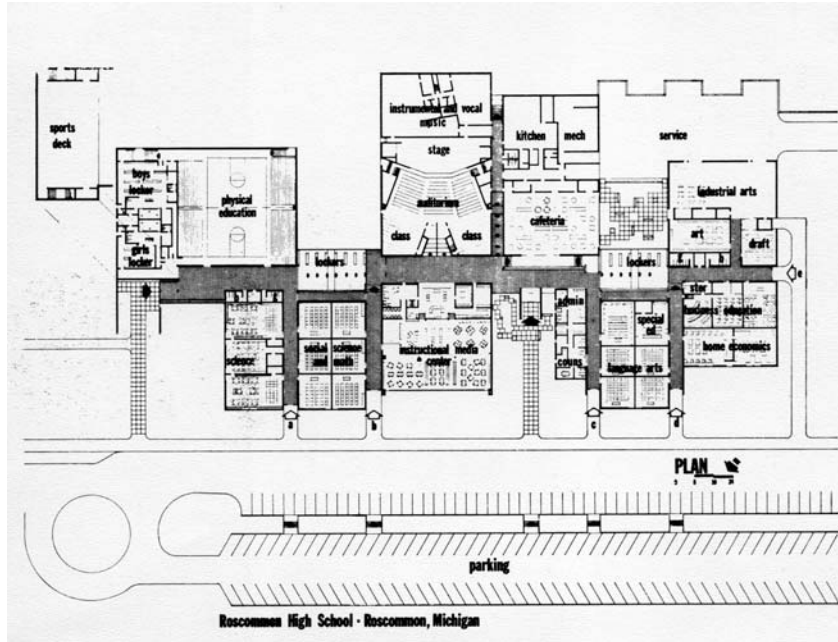
BUILDING FORMS (1945-Today)

INTERIOR CLASSROOM PLAN

The energy crisis of the 1970s resulted in school buildings with fewer windows and with the building's structure sunk deeper into the ground. Plans contain a series of main and secondary hallways with inward orientation of grouped windowless classrooms. The external appearance is a series of low, flat-roofed, one- or two-story, square or rectangular masonry blocks that display little glazing.



The plan for Roscommon High School from 1974 displays the series of main and secondary corridors and grouped classrooms common in the interior classroom plan. The plan and appearance of the building is similar to a suburban shopping mall.



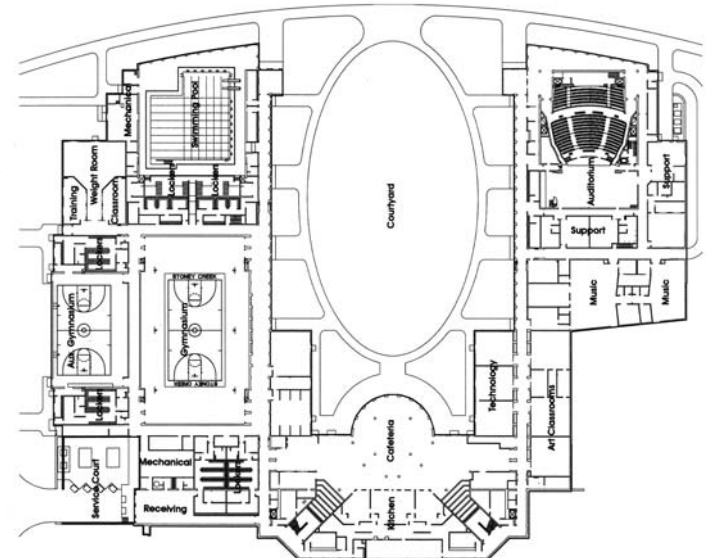
FLEXIBLE SCHOOL PLAN

Today, as new school buildings grow in square footage, their forms have changed to include two- and three-story sections. The economy's service sector influence on education is reflected in the corporate appearance of some of today's schools.

The number of load-bearing walls is kept to the minimum so that spaces can be expanded or subdivided. Classroom design is more generic so that new types of classes or teaching methods in the future can be accommodated. Building materials are pre-cast or modular to minimize cost and labor.



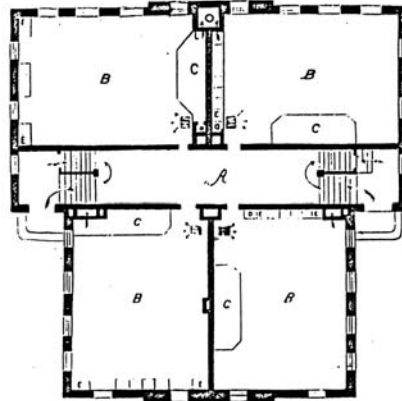
Stoney Creek High School in Rochester Hills, designed by French Associates, contains three educational wings for physical education, performing arts, and academics. Like earlier schools, the media center is the central focus of the school.



KEY ARCHITECTS OF MICHIGAN'S PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS

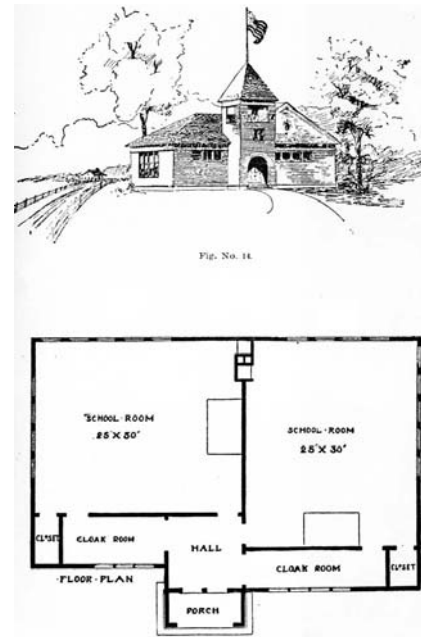
Listed here are the names of just a few of the architects or architectural firms that designed public school buildings throughout Michigan. Some of their designs were published in the annual reports of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction as good examples of school design. School boards often relied on local or regional architects to design school buildings in their areas.

Gordon P. Randall of Chicago, Illinois, authored the *Book of Designs for School Houses* in 1884. His design for Haven School in Chicago was published in the 1863 report of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction, the first report to offer examples of good school design. Randall designed the Marshall Union School of 1868-1870 and the Menominee High School in the mid-1880s.



The plan for Menominee's high school was published in Gordon P. Randall's *Book of Designs for School Houses* from 1884. Its simple circulation and classroom plan was typical of his designs.

Mead & White (Earl H. Mead and Thomas E. White) of Lansing provided model school designs for several editions of the annual reports of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction in the 1890s and 1910s. Examples of school buildings that followed these designs have been discovered, but no school buildings designed by the firm have been identified.



The 1890s designs by Mead & White featured central towers and prominent hip roofs.

Malcomson & Higginbotham (William G. Malcomson and William E. Higginbotham) of Detroit were responsible for over 75% of Detroit's public school buildings from 1894, with the design of Central High School (now Old Main, Wayne State University), until 1923. William Higginbotham served as Detroit's school board architect. Schools designed by Malcomson & Higginbotham can be found across Michigan.



Central High School, now Old Main on the campus of Wayne State University, was Malcomson & Higginbotham's first school building for the Detroit Board of Education.

Perkins, Fellows and Hamilton (Dwight Perkins, John Hamilton, and William Fellows) of Chicago, Illinois, mainly designed school buildings in the 1910s-1920s. Dwight Perkins was Chicago's school board architect in the early 20th century. The firm designed several school buildings in southeastern and southwestern Michigan.

Warren S. Holmes Company of Lansing designed numerous Michigan school buildings from the firm's establishment in 1920 into the 1960s. The firm practiced in the Upper and Lower Peninsula of Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Illinois and was especially active in school design during the Great Depression and the 1940s.



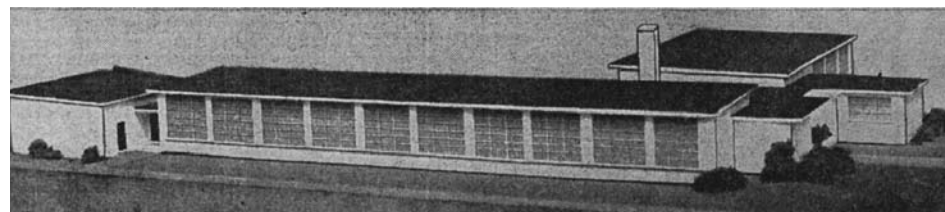
Malcolm School from 1941 in Sault Ste. Marie, designed by Warren S. Holmes Company, features decorative tiles and playful sculpture in the vestibule.

Eberle M. Smith Associates of Detroit was established in 1942. Eberle M. Smith previously worked with Albert Kahn, the Michigan architect known worldwide for his innovative industrial design and work with the early automobile companies; Malcomson & Higginbotham; and Lyndon & Smith in which he was a partner. Lyndon & Smith's design for Northville's grade school from 1936 was chosen by the American Institute of Architects to be presented at the Paris Exposition in 1937. Eberle M. Smith Associates designed school buildings in southeastern Michigan in the 1940s-1960s.

Walter T. Anicka of Ann Arbor was a leading school and small house designer in the 1940s-1960s. His designs for public school buildings were mainly in several communities in south and central Michigan, but he also oversaw Traverse City's school building program in the 1950s.

Manson, Jackson & Kane was initially founded in 1948 by Elmer Manson. The Lansing firm became Manson, Jackson & Kane (Edward Jackson and William Kane) in 1959. The firm designed many school buildings from the 1960-1980s in central and northern Michigan. William Kane was the principal designer most involved with school construction and has worked on over 300 school projects in 80 school districts throughout Michigan.

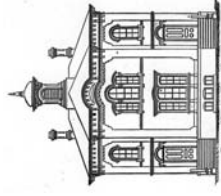
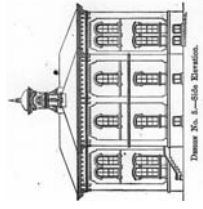
French Associates, now in Rochester, was originally founded in 1971 by Roy G. French in Port Huron. The firm has specialized in the design of school buildings, most of them in southeastern and central Michigan, from the 1970s to the present. French Associates has designed or remodeled more than 289 school buildings in 13 counties in southeast Michigan.



Walter T. Anicka's 1949 design for a six-room school in the Dublin school district west of Pontiac was described as a "ranch" school for its one-story sprawling footprint that was similar to contemporary ranch houses.

Michigan Public School Building Survey

State Historic Preservation Office
Michigan Historical Center
Box 30740
702 W. Kalamazoo
Lansing, Michigan 48909-8240



Please provide us with information about the school buildings in your community. Fill out the form as completely as possible and send it, with a current photograph of the school, to the address above. Please copy the blank form and complete a separate form for each school in your community.

Original School Name _____

Current Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ or Township _____

County _____

Date of construction _____ Architect _____

Major Additions/Changes & Dates _____

School type _____

School Form _____

School style _____

Building materials: Foundation _____ Exterior
Walls _____ Roof _____

List any special decorative features (tiles or drinking fountains, murals, carved woodwork) _____

Are there special function rooms in the school? Please check as many boxes as apply.

☐ Gymnasium ☐ Art Room ☐ Vocational ☐ Auditorium

☐ Library ☐ Science Room ☐ Music Room

Other _____

How is the School Being Used Today (if as a school, which grades are in the building?) _____



History of the School – Please provide any information you have about the history of the school building including the important people, dates, and trends that relate to its development. Copies of old photographs, drawings, floor plans, maps, school histories, and community history articles about the school are welcome and should be attached to this form.

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Name_

Address_

Phone_____

E-mail address

Date _____



